

# The Builder.

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**W**AKE-SHIFT is the present order of the day in legislation. Just enough to pacify is given, instead of the right thing,—a "lick and a promise" instead of fulfilment. Matters concerning the comfort, health, and life of the community have occupied no small share of the attention of the present Government; indeed, the principal measures that will be passed by them will have reference to these important objects. The Metropolis Water Supply Bill, the Metropolitan Burials Bill, and the Metropolitan Sewers Bill are virtually passed; but are these satisfactory to any who have given thought to the subjects? We unhesitatingly answer, No. And the great and serious misfortune is, that what is now done will have the effect of preventing for many years to come any more complete and comprehensive improvement. Ministers have manifested a desire to act usefully in this respect, but they and our legislators generally have feared to deal with the question in that large and complete manner which is demanded. We want water of the best quality, laid on always and everywhere, at the smallest possible cost: we require the sewage of the metropolis taken harmlessly away and economically applied; the Thames freed from pollution; and the suicidal practice of interring the dead in the midst of the living entirely prevented. Unfortunately we are not assured of obtaining any one of these crying necessities by the Bills which are about to become Acts. After an inquiry in the matter of the water companies which has not cost less than 100,000*l.*—in other words, which will lead to the transference of that sum from the pockets of the ratepayers to those of Parliamentary agents, barristers, solicitors, engineers, and others,—the main point assured is that after August 1855 (three years hence, mark), the companies are to be restricted from taking water for supplying the metropolis from the Thames below Teddington Lock! The weight of evidence is wholly against making the Thames the source of our supply. Irrespective of its present fearfully polluted state by the sewers, the enormous quantity of lime which it contains gives it a degree of hardness that makes it in a pecuniary point of view an enormous secret tax upon the community,—a tax paid on our cleanliness, our washing, our tea, our beer, and other items, amounting to hundreds of thousands of pounds per annum. Strong evidence has been given of the superiority of pure hill-top gathered waters, as urged by the Board of Health, over that from the valleys; but this has been completely ignored by Parliament.

The same view as that set forth by the Board of Health was taken 120 years ago by a leading experimentalist, Dr. Stephen Hales, in his *Statical Essays*.<sup>\*</sup> It may be worth while to quote a passage. He says (vol. ii. p. 240),—

"Yet there are some waters which deposit so

tartarine incrustations in the vessels they are boiled in: such is the water which is conveyed in a pipe for the public use of the inhabitants of Hoxham, in Hertfordshire, which rises from a gravel, and boils up through a fine white sand, which has no incrustation in a boiler that has been used for fifteen years: and such is the water with which Mr. Sergeant Baynes's finely situated house, at Havering-hill, in Essex, is supplied with; the top of that hill, whence it flows, and on which the ancient Royal Bower stood, being gravel; whence, as also from sand, the purest spring water has been observed to flow, if it have not first passed through strata that it can dissolve. Such also is the water which his Majesty's Palace at Hampton Court is supplied with, which leaves no incrustation in the coffee-house boiler that has been in constant use for fourteen years. It has the same quality at the fountain head at Mr. Harvey's, at Comb; and it is the same with the waters which arise at North Hoxham, and in Old Park, which supply the Dean and Prebendaries, and other inhabitants of Canterbury. These waters come from gravelly hills, and are conveyed thence in leaden pipes, one from Comb-hill, in Surrey, and the other from a high hill about a quarter of a mile's distance from Canterbury. So that water seems not to contract any tartarine quality from gravel."

And again:—

"The Comb water is observed to be softer, and to wash linen clean with a less quantity of soap than either Thames water or the water of the river which runs across Hoxham-leath to Hampton Court. Whence it seems not improbable that the hardness of many waters, and their curdling and coagulating of soap, may be in a good measure owing to the tartarine quality with which they are impregnated."

Without insisting on the correctness of the statements of those who advocate the hill-top gathered water, it seems to us that the question should, at all events, have been set at rest by the best attainable evidence; and, if the advantages had been found to be as stated, the source pointed out should have been adopted. Individuals have learned that the most complete arrangements pay best in the long run, and are beginning to estimate the wisdom of expenditure by the amount it will return: surely with a community there is more reason for the adoption of this wise policy.

The administration of the water supply and of the sewage of the metropolis should be in the same hands: until they are so, neither can be perfect. The condition of both at this moment is a disgrace to a civilised community. "It is absolutely astonishing," says Dr. James Johnson, "that in these days of refinement, and in a metropolis whose inhabitants pride themselves on delicacy and cleanliness, a practice should obtain at which posterity will shudder if they can credit it. A time must come when the people of London will open their eyes to this scene of corruption, veiled as it is by iron pipes and stone pavements."

The last step taken in the Sewers Commission was not a wise one. The most eminent of the engineers who accepted the unpaid offices of Commissioners of Sewers, were on the point of resigning, we believe, on the occasion of the refusal of Sir Charles Wood, the last Chancellor of the Exchequer, to remove the technical difficulties to the borrowing of money, which prevented the execution of the large drainage works for the metropolis, of which the plans had been approved. The condition of things at that time was fully pointed out in the speech of Lord Ebrington at the close of the last session, on the Sewers Bill, which we have before now quoted. The Commissioners were then persuaded to remain in office. On the accession of the new Government, some annoyance was expressed at the mode in which the present Sewers Bill was brought forward, without consideration of the Commissioners' propositions. On the death

of Mr. Lowe we understand that the expression of a hope was conveyed to the proper authorities that no one would be appointed chairman who would not be acceptable to the Commissioners. In this respect they appear, however, to have been as little consulted as they were upon the proposed Bill. No personal objection is felt to the chairman who has just been appointed: he is alike stranger to the Commissioners and to the works, and indeed to the law and practice on the subject. But as if their own legal secretary would not furnish sufficient law, a legal chairman is again appointed, while what was wanted on the commission was a man well versed in the subject-matter with which he would have to deal, one in whom the Commissioners could place confidence, not for his law, but for his superior powers of management and direction in an important and difficult trust, a man who would assist the Commissioners, and not one whom they may be required to assist. This is the reported position of the Commission, and the result is, from this or some other cause, that Sir William Cubitt, Mr. Robert Stephenson, Mr. Peto, and Mr. Rendel have now sent in their resignations, which have, we believe, been accepted. Who will say when the Thames is to be purified?

The Burial Act may be made useful even as it is, if it be carried out with knowledge and vigour. If we are to judge, however, from a sentence in the speech of the mover, little will be done with it. Lord John Manners said, "As it was proposed to close only such burial grounds as should be proved a public nuisance, no compensation could be demanded, and none ought to be paid. It might be objected that, as the Bill stood, the Home Secretary might close grounds as nuisances which in the eye of the common law were no nuisances at all. All he could say was, that nothing was more likely than that his right hon. friend the present Home Secretary would exercise that power in a manner to avoid such a difficulty."

If only such grounds are to be closed as are proved public nuisances, what with the ignorance on the subject which still exists, the wilful blindness of some, and the struggles of interested parties, the evil work will long go on. Burial within towns ought to be at once and wholly forbidden. It is an enormity which barbarian nations from the earliest times have recognised and avoided, an enormity proved, an enormity pronounced against by the people and by Parliament, and which is nevertheless still to be practised. What we are speaking of are not trifling matters: they concern a city where 156 persons die every day, and thousands die annually from preventible causes; where, during the next thirty-one years, there will be two and a quarter millions of bodies to be buried. In England and Wales there are of the male population 266,000 constantly sick; and 165,000 of these are to be found in London alone;—this London where every year 16,000 persons are shot out from the prisons on to the streets without resources, where 30,000 naked children roam on the pavements, where one out of every twenty of the inhabitants awakes without knowing where to find food or shelter! It is time that large evils were looked at with large minds.

**PLATINA IN GALLOWAY.**—This valuable metal has been discovered on a farm near the mouth of the Urr, parish of Buitla.—*Edinburgh Evening Post*.

<sup>\*</sup> London, 1733.